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## Honduras

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2010**

**November 17, 2010**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,278 square miles and a population of 7.8 million. An estimated 90 percent of the population is mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), 8 percent is indigenous, and the rest is principally of European, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern descent.

There are no reliable government statistics on religious affiliation. In a 2007 nationwide survey, CID-Gallup reported that 47 percent of respondents identified themselves as Roman Catholic and 36 percent as evangelical Protestant. Other sources varied. The principal religious groups are Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant groups. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission Churches. A growing number of evangelical churches have no denominational affiliation. The Evangelical Confederation of Honduras represented the evangelical leadership. There were approximately 2,000 Muslims and 1,000 Jews. San Pedro Sula has a mosque and a synagogue, and Tegucigalpa has a synagogue.

#### Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There is no state religion. The government officially recognized only the Catholic Church as a "church." Other government-recognized religious organizations were classified as "religious associations" but not as "churches" and did not enjoy the rights and privileges of churches. By law only the legislature has the authority to confer the status of a legally recognized "church." The constitution provides the executive branch power to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious organizations, which provides for tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty. Non-Catholic religious groups, including the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras with approximately 8,000 affiliated churches, petitioned Congress for recognition as "churches" but operated as religious associations while awaiting a decision.

Associations seeking juridical personality are required to submit an application to the Ministry of Government and Justice describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group from the Evangelical Confederation of Honduras for review. This group may suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications are also referred to the solicitor general's office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. Approved resolutions are signed by the president. The government does not require religious groups to register.

The armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. Each military base commander selected either a Catholic or Protestant chaplain. These 40 chaplains were not military career chaplains but were entitled to a salary and military uniform for the duration of their military chaplaincy. Prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions; however, in 2009 the Catholic Church withdrew from the National Anticorruption Commission.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas.

The government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Ministry of Government and Justice. The ministry generally grants such permits.

Under article 148 of the Law of Social Harmony, the government prohibited immigration of foreign missionaries who practiced religions claiming to use witchcraft or satanic rituals and allowed deportation of foreigners who practiced witchcraft or religious fraud.

There were religious schools that provided professional training, such as seminaries, and church-operated schools that provided general education, such as parochial schools. They neither received special treatment from the government nor did they face any restrictions.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

The constitution stipulates that only laypersons may seek election to Congress.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

On September 25, 2009, the news director of Radio Globo broadcast extremely offensive anti-Semitic remarks; he later apologized.

The Catholic Church reported harassment of priests and nuns, including death threats, and vandalism. In 2009 persons alleging that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the country supported the June 28, 2009, coup d'état issued death threats against Catholic Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, and threatened to burn down the cathedral in Tegucigalpa. Demonstrators spray-painted political graffiti on the walls of the cathedral and on other church property. In September 2009 Catholic priest Ismael Moreno received several death threats during political demonstrations.

The Catholic archbishop of Tegucigalpa actively promoted ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives maintained a regular dialogue with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and religious organizations.

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